

# **MAHADEV DESAI'S EARLY LIFE**

By  
**Narahari D. Parikh**



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MAHADEVBHAI ( In Agra Jail, 1922 )

# MAHADEV DESAI'S EARLY LIFE

by  
NARAHARI D. PARIKH

Translated from the Gujarati  
by  
GOPALRAO KULKARNI



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE  
AHMEDABAD

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Shri Naraharibhai has been, for the last two years, editing Mahadevbhai's diaries. He thought of writing a sketch, giving an outline of Mahadevbhai's life, to serve as an introduction to the fourth part of the diaries. In connection with this he went through the relevant portions of the material collected by the Navajivan Trust for Mahadevbhai's biography, and produced in twentythree chapters an interesting and instructive story dealing with Mahadevbhai's life upto the time of his joining Gandhiji. After going through this manuscript, I thought it well to publish it as a separate booklet. Shri Naraharibhai agreed to this and thus this booklet of Mahadevbhai's early life has come to be produced.

I would like to thank all those who by supplying information or material relating to Mahadevbhai's life have helped towards the publication of this booklet, and have thus given me an opportunity of at least fulfilling partially both my desire as well as the wishes of Mahadevbhai's numerous friends, relatives and admirers that his biography should be written.

Navajivan,  
Ahmedabad, 5-6-'50

Jivanji D. Desai

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Most of the reading public of India know of Mahadev Desai, as the faithful, life-long secretary of Gandhiji. But very few know anything of the forces that shaped his life and career. This booklet lifts the veil and lets us have a peep into intimate details connected with his early life. It has been written by one who was closer to Mahadev than a brother, knew him intimately from his student days, and worked as his colleague through life.

It was written originally in Gujarati and translated into Hindi. In this English edition, my work has been to revise the translation and to edit it. While keeping faithfully to the main events as described in the original, I have cut out only a few minor details, to make the biography concise and vivid.

Bombay, 31-7-'51

Bharatan Kumarappa

## PREFACE

Mahadevbhai's life falls naturally into two parts, each of twentyfive years' duration, the earlier from 1892 to 1917 and the later from 1917 to 1942. The present booklet covers only the earlier part of his life, although some incidents belonging to the beginning of the later part have crept in, owing to the fact that the story has been narrated upto the death of Mahadevbhai's father.

Shri Chandrashankar had taken certain notes about Mahadevbhai's earlier life from Shri Chhotubhai, Mahadevbhai's uncle's son. These, together with the reminiscences submitted by Shri Vaikunthlal Mehta, have been liberally drawn upon in writing this booklet. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sense of indebtedness to these three friends.

5-6-'50

Narahari Parikh

## NON-ENGLISH WORDS WITH MEANINGS

- Bapu* (*Bapuji*) — father ; a term of endearment used for Gandhiji by his close followers
- Bhagat* — religious devotee
- Bhajan* — prayers in the form of song
- Chappals* — leather sandals
- Chawl* — tenement
- Ekadashi* — eleventh day of the waxing and waning moon
- Halva* — a sweet dish
- Jagirdar* — a holder of rent-free land
- Manabhatta* — a wandering minstrel or bard
- Mantra* — religious or magic formula
- Patel* — village officer
- Pranams* — respects
- Puri* — a kind of fried puffed bread
- Raga* — melody ; tune
- Ramalila* — story of Rama enacted as a play
- Roti* — flat, unleavened bread
- Sadhak* — A religious aspirant
- Sahib* (*Saheb*) — gentleman ; often used in the sense of European gentleman
- Sanad* — certificate ; licence to practise as a lawyer
- Satyagraha* — literally clinging to truth or soul force ; non-violent resistance
- Shraddha* — worship for peace for the departed soul
- Siddhi* — superhuman power
- Talati* — a village revenue collector
- Tantra* — magic formula

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# MAHADEV DESAI'S EARLY LIFE



## BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

Mahadev was born on 1st January, 1892 in village Saras of Olpad Taluka in Surat District. His father was a teacher in the primary school of that village. His native place was Dihen, a village in the same Taluka, situated at a distance of ten miles from Surat. Mahadev's three brothers died in infancy one after another. When Mahadev was expected, his parents were therefore very anxious that he should survive and his mother took a vow to worship God Siva in the temple of Siddhanath Mahadev, about a mile from Saras. She pledged herself to name the child Mahadev, should it be a boy and Parvati, if it were a girl. The first letter of Mahadev's name ought to have been 'J' according to the sign of the Zodiac, but she named her son Mahadev because of her pledge.

Mahadev's family was known by the name of Teelva in his caste. This name may have been derived from the fact that his forefathers in their devotional tradition used to have religious marks on their foreheads, which are known as "Teelas". One branch of the family went to Olpad from Dihen, where they acquired much land and earned much money. That branch was regarded as being of a comparatively higher level in the caste. They obtained the greater portion of Desaigiri, whereas the branch of the family at Dihen received only a nominal portion, so that it remained very poor.

Mahadev's grandfather, Soorbhai Bhagat, was a devotee of Ganpati. He used to organize a big celebration on Ganesh Chaturthi, including a religious procession and a public dinner. He never failed to organize this celebration in spite of his poverty, which compelled him occasionally to remain without food.

Soorbhai had four sons. The eldest of these died young, while the remaining three, Haribhai, Bapubhai and Khandubhai, were quite young when Soorbhai died. The grandmother provided for the education of these three children in the village school by selling the produce of the cow she kept. She had also a plot of paddy field, for which she maintained a bullock ; she had, however, to borrow occasionally another bullock to make a pair for ploughing the field. When the bullock died, Haribhai and Bapubhai had to yoke themselves to the plough to cultivate paddy in the field that season. Nevertheless the cost of living not being as high as it is now, and people being used to hard work and thrift, they did not have to struggle for existence as today. Even those that were considered to be poor could get as much good food as they required. Besides, life then was free from all the artificialities of today.

The whole house danced with joy when, after passing his seventh Gujarati form, Bapubhai secured employment on a salary of rupees four per month. He eventually got a *Talati's* job on rupees twelve a month. Mahadev's father, Haribhai, obtained admission as a scholar in the Ahmedabad Training College after passing his seventh form, and secured the diploma of Senior Trained Teacher. His younger uncle, Khandubhai took a surveyor's job in Rajpipla State. After-



wards he joined Junagadh State Service and continued there to the end.

Mahadev's father, Haribhai, secured a job at Tukwada in Paradi Taluka after obtaining his Teacher's Diploma. He eventually was transferred to Saras in Olpad Taluka, where Mahadev was born. Mahadev's mother, Jamnabai, belonged to a fairly well-to-do family of Dihen. She was sharp in intelligence and by nature. The whole village respected her. Mahadev resembled his father in build and his mother in appearance. His mother expired in June 1899 at the age of 32, leaving Mahadev who was only seven years old. Both the parents had deep affection for the child. If any one scolded Mahadev, his mother would protest and say that children would get spoilt if they were made to fear. Mahadev did not tell me more about his mother except that she brought him up with great love and kept him like a prince even with his father's meagre monthly salary of fifteen rupees. He specially remembered that his mother many a time prepared *halva* just for him.

The father was straight-forward and simple. He trusted any one readily. He had a very good memory and keen intelligence. His handwriting was extremely beautiful. When he was studying in the Training College, his notes written in a neat hand were taken away for reference by junior students. He as well as Bapubhai were very strong in arithmetic. Bapubhai especially was so good in numbers that in Mahadev's opinion he would have easily secured Senior Wrangler-ship if he had had a chance. When High School teachers and college students came to the village during vacations, they used to refer difficult problems in arithmetic to him and he used to solve them in no

time. Once there was a function in the family for which he brought two cartloads of things from Surat. He enumerated from memory the whole list of articles with the weight and price of each. Haribhai got together all the boys at night and taught them calculations and sums in arithmetic. He had never touched a text book of arithmetic during his entire career as a teacher. He taught all the methods orally and dictated sums of his own making. Mahadev too had inherited skill in numbers. He had not studied accountancy systematically and yet he could easily go into details of accounts. Although Gandhiji had a number of assistants later, Mahadev was his sole assistant for a number of years, and kept a detailed account of all donations and presents received, as well as of expenses incurred during Gandhiji's travels.

Haribhai was a vast reader of Gujarati literature. He read all good books with perseverance. Although he had not studied Sanskrit, he had read the Ramayan, Mahabharat, Gita and the Upanishads with the help of commentaries. Very fond of *bhajans*, he used to sing them early in the morning, sitting in bed. He evinced deep interest in the science of education and whenever he visited the Ashram he discussed National Education, visited our classes and gave us suggestions regarding them. He had started as an assistant teacher in a village primary school and retired as a headmaster of the Women's Training College of Ahmedabad. Although he grew up and lived under the old system of education, he was not slow in grasping and accepting new ideas in education. In spite of the fact that even great educationists of the day believed that corporal punishment was necessary to make students good and studious, Haribhai not only never beat his



students, but won their hearts by love. Cursing in filthy language was (and even today is) a common practice in the villages of Surat District. Yet he not only never himself uttered a filthy word, but he also would not tolerate others doing so in his presence. He created a very good impression on all the people of the villages, where he worked as a teacher and won their love. Being, moreover, a man of independent thinking and self-respect, he was esteemed also by educational inspectors.

## 2

## EARLY EDUCATION

Mahadev was educated in a manner befitting a brilliant son of a poor, yet cultured and intelligent father. Having lost his mother while still very young, he was looked after by his grand-mother. He completed his fifth Gujarati form, studying in villages in which his father worked. In those days you could join an English School only after completing your fifth form. But where to study English was a problem. There was not a single English School in the whole of Olpad Taluka. The nearest was in Surat. It was possible to keep Mahadev at the residence of Shri Chandulal Ghelabhai Doctor, his father's intimate friend, who stayed at Shahpore and who loved Mahadev dearly. But the father did not feel like leaving his son, who had not yet entered his teens, in a city like Surat.

**At Dihen**

In the meantime, Shri Manishankar, a Brahmin resident of Dihen, who had studied upto the

matriculation standard, started an English School there. As it was in his own village, the father placed his son there in 1901 for his English education. Mahadev had then just completed nine years of age. As a teacher, Shri Manishankar was very dilligent and hard-working. But he was so excitable that the slightest provocation enraged him. He used his cane freely on mischievous students and went on beating until the cane itself gave way. Half a dozen boys, including Mahadev's cousin, Chhotubhai, were proof against the master's cane. The teacher, therefore, used to strike their heads and rub their noses against the wall. But the fit of anger having subsided, he was his own loving self again. Mahadev trembled with fear merely at seeing the teacher beating his classmates. He himself, however, escaped the teacher's cane.

This teacher conducted classes of the first three English standards. Not only did Mahadev learn his lessons of the first standard thoróughly, but he used to pick up the lessons of the second and third standards better than boys of those classes, by merely hearing them taught by the teacher. When Mahadev later on became well known as a scholar of English language and literature, this teacher took pride in the fact that it was he who laid the foundation of Mahadev's knowledge of English. Mahadev too always felt grateful to his teacher and sent him a complimentary copy of any book he wrote. When he edited *Arjunwani*, he presented him a copy of it, writing thereon, "Presented with *Pranams* to my first English Teacher."

This teacher used to call the students to his house every night for study after they had finished their evening meals, and talked to them about religion for an

hour or so, taught them the daily prayer explaining its meaning, and then helped them in their studies. This was his usual routine for the night assemblies.

Besides this, a man named Jivanram Vaidya, who had some knowledge of religious books, took great interest in teaching religion to children. Having got them together he used to narrate to them stories from the Upanishads, of Nachiketa, Upmanyu, Uddalak and others.

Also, when it was impossible in the rainy season to go out for work in the fields, old persons in the village used to read manuscript copies of the Ramayan, Mahabharat or Bhagwat. When the monsoon was over *manabhatts* came to recite stories from the Mahabharat, and *Ramalila* parties staged plays based on the life of Rama.

There was a doctor without degree named Surbhai Shankarji in the village. He was fond of music. Mahadev used to go to him for learning music and was able to pick up a few *ragas*.

Mahadev was given the sacred thread at the age of seven. His mother was living then. Mahadev's two elder cousins too got the thread with him. The incantation of Gayatri was taught by master Manishankar. One of Manishankar's brothers was a teacher in Ankaleswar. He knew Sanskrit well. When he came to Dihin in the summer vacation, he got together the boys at night and explained to them verses from the works of poet Kalidas and told them stories from literature. Through all these channels Mahadev obtained some knowledge of religion and literature during the year and a half of his study of English at Dihin.



### At Junagadh

How to prosecute further English study was now a problem. It was decided to send him with his two cousins to Nana Kaka, Mahadev's uncle, who was at Junagadh. The certificate given by the master at Dihen being an unofficial one, Mahadev was re-examined and admitted to the fourth standard in Junagadh. The aunt was rather strict. She made all the three boys rise at 5 a.m. The uncle, being a disciple of Shri Nathuram Sharma, compelled the boys to have their morning prayers soon after finishing their toilette. They were then to wash their own clothes in the local tank. After returning home, they had to sift and clean the daily rice and pulse and then start their lessons. Mahadev had never washed clothes, nor had he ever stepped into a water reservoir. He was so nervous in getting down the steps of the tank, that he did so in a sitting posture. Seeing this, his cousin, Chhotubhai, let him sit outside and washed his clothes for him. When the aunt came to know about this, she scolded Mahadev for not washing his own clothes. One day Chhotubhai began to swim in the tank. Mahadev ran home weeping and told the aunt that Chhotubhai had fallen into the tank and may drown. The aunt ran to the tank and found to her great relief that Chhotubhai was only swimming. When the uncle came to know about this incident, he stopped sending the boys for washing clothes in the tank. He decided that the aunt should wash the clothes at the well and the boys should draw water for her by turns. Mahadev had never drawn water from a well, so that when his turn came, his palms became red and he felt like crying. Chhotubhai then exempted him from drawing water,

but gave him the work of sifting the daily rice and pulse all himself.

There was a mango tree in the college compound. Boys used to eat its raw fruit. One day Chhotubhai climbed the tree and Mahadev and his other cousin stood below, eating the mangoes thrown down by Chhotubhai. The watchman suddenly came and caught the two boys standing below. When he climbed the tree to catch Chhotubhai, the latter escaped by jumping down. The two were taken to the head master, who fined them four annas each.

Mahadev stayed in Junagadh for a year. All through that year he led a regular life of daily prayers and compulsory fasting on *ekadashi* and on other days of penance. He used to go to pay his obeisance to Shri Nathuram Sharma, whenever Shri Sharma came to Junagadh, and the latter always inquired whether he continued to offer his prayers twice every day. The life at Junagadh was thus a life of strict discipline.

### 3

## IN SURAT HIGH SCHOOL

About this time his father was transferred to Adajan, which was only two and a half miles from Surat on the other side of the Tapti. It was possible to stay at Adajan and attend School at Surat. Mahadev and his two cousins, therefore, were brought back from Junagadh after they had completed their fourth form. Mahadev was admitted to the fifth form in Surat at the end of 1903. Shri Jivanlal Divan taught arithmetic daily in the first period. Having to walk a long distance from Adajan in the cold of winter, Mahadev

was usually late by fifteen to twenty minutes for the class. Shri Divan made him stand on the bench for this irregularity. Mahadev underwent this punishment ungrudgingly. Shri Divan, however, found that the boy was extremely good and clever in his lessons, and therefore stopped making him stand on the bench. Mahadev often told me that Shri Divan taught geometry so well, that he remembered even later everything he was taught.

### At Adajan

In the year 1904 plague broke out in Surat and almost all over Gujarat. Mahadev's school was closed. All the boys in the house were sent away for two months to uncle Bapubhai, who was a *Talati* in village Damka, near Hajira. That village was once visited by a *Ramlila* party. Mahadev, Chhotubhai and other boys went to see the programme every night. These boys being students of English Schools, the Koli residents of the village arranged for them to talk on the drink evil. Mahadev said that he felt shy to face the audience and would, therefore, deliver his speech standing behind a curtain ! He did so, but Chhotubhai spoke facing the audience. Both the speeches were liked by the people.

One day the son of the Patel of Adajan struck on a novel idea. He said, "Our Mahadev is white in complexion and he will look like a veritable Saheb, if he puts on a hat and suit. Besides, he can speak English quite well. Let us frighten the Parsi toddy contractor, by paying a visit to his toddy shed. Chhotubhai should play the role of the clerk, while Mahadev will present himself as the Saheb." Mahadev then changed into a Saheb's clothes. He took a fancy cane in his hand and the party went to the toddy shed.



The toddy man was frightened when he was informed that the Saheb was coming on a visit. He threw away the toddy that was adulterated with water. The Patel showed the Saheb round his toddy shop. The Saheb spoke fluent English, and Chhotubhai asked questions in Gujarati. This went on for about five minutes. But then the Saheb got an itching sensation on his head and had to take off his hat, when his conventional tuft of hair showed itself and every one was afraid that the bubble would burst and all of them would receive a sound beating from the Parsi. Chhotubhai, however, used his presence of mind and said, "The Saheb does not belong to England. He is from Madras. He has just taken his degree." With these words, all of them took to their heels without stopping there even for a minute. But the road to the school passed by the side of the toddy shed. Mahadev decided not to take that road for fear of being beaten by the Parsi! He continued going over a longer distance by the main road for a few days.

These happy days at Adajan had their unseemly side too. The impure and uncultured atmosphere of the village could not but have some effect on Mahadev's course of life. The land was fertile and the villagers could earn something by selling vegetables and milk in the city. Some of the boys who were spoilt by the city, boasted of their achievements, as though they had done something brave. Some talked of keeping a second wife and of driving away the first one. Gay youngsters of the city, who visited the village to enjoy the harvest season, brought with them the filth of the city. Mahadev did not understand the full significance of all these things then; but they could not but leave their impression on his tender mind. One day a boy

went to the length of proposing to take Mahadev to a girl. It being a hot summer night, all the people slept in the open. The boy came to call Mahadev. The latter, however, did not dare to go with him at night. He begged to be excused as he was feeling very sleepy. Mahadev was thus saved for sheer want of courage. He narrated to me this and other incidents of his life, with sorrowful recollection in the year 1928, twenty-two years after this incident had happened. After mentioning the episode, Mahadev remarked : "That I could keep myself pure even in such a filthy atmosphere is due to my good luck and the extreme kindness of God."

## 4

## MARRIAGE

Mahadev was married in the year 1905 when he was studying in the sixth form. Durgabahen is younger than Mahadev by one year. Her parents belonged to Kaliawadi, a village near Navsari. Her father, Shri Khandubhai Lallubhai Desai, was a Deputy Educational Inspector in the Education Department. Although Mahadev's family enjoyed a high position they were not financially well off. Being an officer in the Education Department, Khandubhai went in person to Mahadev's school to ascertain the qualities of the boy. He fell in love with the boy at first sight. He, therefore, decided to fix the match on the principle that after all it is the groom that matters in building up a household, not the wealth of his family. Khandubhai was the disciple of Shri Nrisinhacharya, who was the founder of the

Shreyasadhak Adhikari Varga. His family too were religious devotees. Durgabahen had studied only upto Gujarati Sixth form, but she had read in her childhood books of the Shreyasadhak Varga and other devotional songs. We shall see later on that Mahadev also had come greatly under the influence of religious devotion. The couple thus came to be, by mere coincidence, suitable for each other.

In narrating her first impressions about Mahadev, Durgabahen told me as follows : “ While we were going to Dihen from Surat after the marriage, we had Mahadev’s two sisters-in-law with us in the cart. Mahadev, being very clever and witty in conversation, he started cutting jokes with his sisters-in-law. I was surprised to hear him talk in that manner. The sisters-in-law asked him, ‘ Why did you get married when you did not want to be married ? You said you would run away from the marriage altar and yet you went round the sacred fire without any protest.’ To this Mahadev replied, ‘ I was not going to marry if I did not like the bride. But I liked this bride. Why then should I refuse or run away ? ’ He went on talking thus with his sisters-in-law all through the journey. Being brought up in the puritanic atmosphere of the Shreyasadhak Varga, I did not like this innocent yet rustic sort of talk. When the cart reached Mahadev’s home and I was asked to get down, I was confronted with a mud hut. I did not think that it was our house. I thought that it must be the hut of a low caste person. This was my first impression, which was removed in time by the manner in which I was treated by my in-laws and the culture that I experienced in the home.”



## MATRICULATION AND COLLEGE

His father was transferred to Bulsar when Mahadev was in the Matriculation class. But thinking it inadvisable for Mahadev to change school in the last year of school, his father continued the establishment at Adajan. Mahadev was taken by his father to Bombay for his examination, as he was too young to travel alone. The father returned to Bulsar immediately as he had to attend office. At Bombay, Mahadev was the guest of his brother-in-law who stayed near Grant Road. Having lost his way while returning from the examination hall, he stood on the road crying, until a policeman took him to the indicated address. He passed his Matriculation examination at the end of 1906 when he was not yet fifteen years of age. He was first in rank in the Surat High School and stood first among successful students of his class in the Matriculation examination. He often said that not only was there no special advantage in passing the Matriculation at such an early age, but also that it was undesirable from the point of view of all round development. I too matriculated in the same year. It was in the following year that the regulation of not admitting students to the Matriculation examination before completing the sixteenth year of age, was passed.

**In the College Hostel**

Mahadev joined the Elphinstone College in January 1907. His father's salary being only Rs 40/- per month, it was not possible for him to meet the expense of Mahadev's studies in Bombay. An application for free admission to the Gokuldas Tejpal Board-

ing House had therefore been sent, but although there was every hope that admission would be secured, the reply was late by ten days. Mahadev stayed in the Elphinstone College Hostel until then. In describing his experience of the first day in that hostel, Mahadev told me that he was simply taken aback when he saw the lordly life of the students, their habit of ordering servants about and spending money at every step, the varied courses at each meal consisting of two vegetable dishes, the regular inclusion of milk and *puries* in the evening meal, and the amount of food that was wasted while eating. How could he throw the burden of such expense on his father? How could he indulge in such luxury in the hostel, when his father was struggling for a coarse meal and lived a frugal life at home? He knew of course that his father would refuse him nothing. But the very fact that his father would grudge him nothing and would meet the expense of his education even by selling his lands, made Mahadev feel worse. He spent the first night weeping. He hardened himself to stay there and spent ten days in great mental agony, only because he had the hope of being admitted as a free student in the G. T. Hostel.

### **Experience of Poverty**

At last he got his admission. He also secured a college scholarship, which enabled him to carry on without being a burden on his father. The G. T. Hostel supplied free board, lodging and clothing and gave nearly half the amount of the college fee. (The Hostel provided the minimum rate of college fee. If a student wanted to join a college with a higher fee, he had to make up the difference on his own). Sundry expenses like purchase of books, tram and local train charges, tea and refreshments, were also met out of the

scholarship amount. In the Intermediate examination, he secured one rank lower than what was required for obtaining a scholarship. It became therefore a problem for him as to how he was to continue his studies. He did not inform his father, as the latter would have insisted on his continuing his studies at any cost. Shri Vaikunthbhai Mehta was his class-mate from the first year and a close friend. Shri Mehta was entitled to a scholarship, having passed with higher rank than Mahadev. But when he came to know about Mahadev's difficulty, he sought his father's permission, which was readily given, to forgo his own claim to the scholarship in favour of Mahadev, without the latter or any one else in the College knowing about it. Sir Lallubhai, Shri Mehta's father, who was called Lallukaka by Mahadev, as well as his own sons and the entire family, had great affection for Mahadev whom they considered as one of themselves.

### **His Heart's Richness**

Such poverty often creates bitterness in the minds of people and they begin to overestimate the value of money and pine for it. But this did not happen to Mahadev. Shri Govardhanram has defined Natural Richness as that quality of the mind which does not pine for wealth, nor feels dejected in the absence of it. Mahadev had Natural Richness in this sense. Shri Vaikunthbhai describes in the following words his impression of Mahadev in College.

“The relations of college students to each other are both sweet and bitter. But I do not remember having heard a single harsh or bitter word from Mahadev, during my four years' companionship with him in the Elphinstone College.



“Seriousness was the main feature of his character from the start. I do not suggest thereby that he lacked the sense of fun that is found amongst students. But I never saw in him the tendency to talk badly of professors or students, nor the spirit of unhealthy competition in games. Whenever I had occasion to talk with him, I found that he was interested in speaking about his studies and about national problems. His liking for conversation was his natural gift, but he attained proficiency in it gradually as his personality developed.”

## 6

## NO LOVE FOR GAMES

I should at this stage mention a special characteristic of Mahadev. Shri Vaikunthbhai has written that he had not seen in him any unhealthy competition in games. Spirit of competition apart, he had no liking for games — indoor or outdoor ; nor could he play any. It is difficult to find a person who has not played cards. Mahadev had not played even cards. He had never participated in outdoor games like running, jumping or cricket. He had no interest in seeing sports or matches. All pleaders of Ahmedabad were as a rule members of the Gujarat Club and played games like cards, chess, billiard, tennis, etc. Mahadev was in Ahmedabad as a pleader for more than a year. But he did not become a member of the Gujarat Club. Instead he became a member of the Himabhai Institute near Bhadra. The Library of the Institute contained mostly old books and its yearly budget was very meagre. After becoming its member, Mahadev

recommended a number of good books and got them ordered even within its small budget.

In the monsoon after the flood when the river Sabarmati had plenty of good, clean water, it was a pleasure to swim in it. During one of the monsoons, Gandhiji too came for a swim regularly. But Mahadev never even tried to learn swimming.

### **Walking — His Only Exercise**

He used to walk to the Navajivan and the Provincial Congress Committee's offices and back every day. I pressed him to learn cycling, which, I said, I would teach him in four days. But he tried it only for a day and having received a slight scratch, gave it up the next day. He argued that he would have to keep away from work for a long period, if by chance he got a bad fall. He would walk rather than take such a risk. And, moreover, walking provided good exercise.

He was fond of walking. Not having taken any systematic exercise, he had not developed a muscular body ; but one cannot say that he was not sturdy. When the Navajivan was stationed at the Pankor Naka and Sarangpur gate in Ahmedabad, he often used to walk from the Ashram to the office and back. He walked briskly and at an average rate of four miles an hour. In the days of Army Recruitment in the year 1918, he was staying at the Hindu Anath Ashram at Nadiad. To get accustomed to long marching, he used to get up very early in the morning and walk a distance of nine miles and back. Even after this walk of eighteen miles, he used to work for Gandhiji the whole day. When Gandhiji shifted from Maganwadi at Wardha to Sevagram, Mahadev continued to live at Maganwadi. From there he used to start at noon on foot for Sevagram, a distance of five and a half miles,

and walk back to Maganwadi in the evening. When sometime there was special work, he used to go and come back twice in a day and that too in the hot sun, thus covering twenty-two miles. It is possible that this was partly responsible for the set back in his health and his blood pressure, for he could not stand the heat of the sun.

### **Sturdiness all the Same**

In spite of such long walks, he did not allow any lessening of his programme of reading, writing and spinning, every morning and night. Mahadev was delicate in appearance. But during continuous travels with Gandhiji, he had to do various kinds of work which taxed both his body and mind, right from a porter's job to that of a writer and ambassador of Gandhiji. In spite of this he was able to sustain himself, although others looking sturdier fell ill and gave up. This was due as much to his practice of walking as to his moderation in food. During travels with Gandhiji people piled articles of food at every station for his party. Lest he should over-eat, Mahadev had for years made it a rule to eat only thrice a day and had observed this rule scrupulously. Outside of these three times, he would not only not take even tea or milk, but he would not chew even a cardamom seed. If by mistake, he put such a seed in his mouth, he would reckon it as one of his three meals. The *rotis* prepared in the G. T. Hostel were not properly baked and boys often suffered from indigestion. But Mahadev never fell ill during his four years of college. 'This was mainly due to his habit of walking and eating less than what he could. I have never seen him eat to the extent of having a full stomach, nor have I ever found him heavy with food, howsoever delicious the courses. In spite of his soft



and slender appearance, he used to be able to take more work out of his body than people who looked strong and sturdy.

Although he had no interest in games, he thoroughly understood and accepted their importance as an indispensable factor in education and growth. He, therefore, encouraged his son Narayan and other children to play games. Once when he stayed at Simla taking a month's holiday, he played badminton with Narayan in order to make him learn the game. This was, of course, his first and last experience of playing a game. He was very anxious to see Narayan become an expert in swimming and cycling and was very pleased when he found his son good at any game or work.

## 7

## FUN AND HUMOUR

In spite of his ignorance of and lack of interest in games, he possessed in full the virtue of sportsmanship. He overlooked defects in others and was always ready to see and imitate their virtues. He may be said to have been of a serious temperament in the sense that he never wasted a single minute in useless talk or gossip. But he was by nature jolly and possessed the art of combining fun and humour in a natural and easy way, even with work of most important nature, so much so that there was always around him an atmosphere of playfulness, joy and enthusiasm even while engaged in onerous tasks.

In the beginning, in our group of the Ashram, the quarters of Kakasaheb, Kishorlal, Mahadev,

Chhaganlal Gandhi, Pandit Khare and mine were next to each other. However heavy the burden of work, we used to have a certain amount of music — classical and light, literary discussion, exposition of art and light conversation, accompanied always by outbursts of laughter. Those who had not actually seen Gandhiji but had simply heard about his philosophy — for with him also, there was an atmosphere of joy and laughter, however heavy or serious the work — might have wondered, on a visit to our quarters, whether all that jollity was in conformity with Ashram life. A lady, staying in another part of the Ashram whose husband talked very little and was very quiet, used often to say to him, “You work for the whole day. But are persons staying in the other quarters not doing any work? How is it then that we feel when we go there that we are in Gokul, the abode of joy?” Mahadev was responsible for the most part for creating such an atmosphere in our group of quarters. A person who could not cut or understand a joke, as well as one who could not be amused or understand things readily, was called by Mahadev ‘dunce’, ‘idiot’ or ‘stupid’. Also such persons, as would not exhibit adequate intelligence in working with him, or would readily give assent to Gandhiji’s behests without understanding them correctly or without considering how to execute them or what their result would be, were fit, in his opinion, for this description. Prof. B. K. Thakor once criticized Mahadev for using adjectives of extreme praise like ‘beautiful’ and ‘extraordinary’ indiscriminately, thus making them cheap and reducing their value. The same criticism is applicable to his inappropriate use of ‘dunce’ and ‘idiot’. But



the fact of the matter is that being genuinely appreciative of merit, the extreme praise offered by Mahadev was an expression of how he really felt, while being unused to finding fault with others he indulged in extreme terms of censure humorously and mostly in regard to persons who were his close friends.

## 8

## STUDIOUSNESS

He was very popular with his professors and clever co-students. Among the latter he was a good friend of Shri Vaikunthbhai, Shri Brelvi of the *Bombay Chronicle*, and the art critic of that paper Shri K. H. Vakil. This friendship lasted throughout his life.

He wrote an English poem for the college magazine when he was in the Junior B.A. class. The Professor of English called him and told him that although his poem was good, he would advise him not to write poems in English or any other language at that age. He should first read widely and study the best poems of great poets. It was only after this that he should write, if he felt inspired to do so. Mahadev accepted this advice readily. He often expressed his regret at the tendency of our youths to take to journalism without adequate observation and study. He warned budding writers that if they went in for writing without study, they would not be able to come up to standard, and if they started writing before their ideas became settled and mature, their progress would stop and there would be an efflux of useless and low kind of literature.

### Interest in Various Subjects

He was fond of reading. Besides text books he used to read other books on the same subjects, as well as general works of literature. One would think that literature would have been the subject of his choice, for he had read widely literature in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and English. Even during his student life, he was a vast reader of poetry, drama and fiction. And yet his choice of philosophy as his optional for B.A., was quite natural, as he had deep interest in that subject. When he was once asked what kind of books he liked, he replied that he was fond of all literature that discussed problems of individual and social life. We have already seen that he grew up in religious surroundings from his childhood. This encouraged his natural religious tendency. Shri Vaikunthbhai writes as follows about his choice of philosophy as an optional subject :

“Mahadev was religious-minded from the beginning. There is no reason to suppose that this religious-mindedness was aroused by his study of philosophy. But there is no doubt that it was strengthened by his deep study of that subject. His life was fully enriched by the opportunity he got, in the course of his college studies, of reading and understanding the systems of philosophy of different countries, and he passed on the benefits of his study to the people.”

We get an idea of the extent of his vast and deep study of Eastern and Western books on religion, philosophy and poetry, by reading his learned introduction to the English Translation of Gandhiji's *Anasaktiyoga* under the caption *My Submission*.

## CONTACT WITH A SAINTLY PERSON

While at college, Mahadev established contact with a saintly person ; this association continued upto the end of the latter's life. The saint enriched Mahadev's life with devotional fervour. It has already been said that his father was transferred to Bulsar when Mahadev was in the Matriculation class. This devotee, named Purushottam Sevakram, belonged to Godhra, but often visited Bulsar. When he was young, he became the disciple of an ascetic who changed his whole outlook on life. He then started roaming about like a mad man, visited a number of sacred places, and having obtained peace of mind returned home after extensive wandering and settled down to his father's occupation as a potter. He made small earthenware of beautiful shape. Every minute he could spare from this work he gave to religious devotion. His knowledge of Gujarati was restricted to mere reading and writing. He was quite ignorant of Sanskrit. He had not read the Gita and the Upanishads even in Gujarati. Devotional songs of our saints were alone his Gita and his Upanishads. While he was thus leading a life of labour and devotion, one of those who visited him at Godhra made it known to the outside world that he was a saint who could show the right path to misguided persons. We do not know whether this disturbed his peace of mind or not, but the work of giving peace to a number of persons in Gujarat was evidently ordained by God for him, for the late Seth Vasanji Khimji, who was always in search of philosophers and saints, came to know about him and



persuaded him to take to the work of reconstructing human beings, in preference to that of making earthenware.

Mahadev writes, "My father introduced me to this saint. During my college life, I had come in contact with the work of Swami Vivekanand and through them I got a glimpse of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. I found in this man the embodiment of what Shri Ramakrishna was. I could understand the true meaning of the writings of the Paramahansa through the sayings of this saint."

When Mahadev's father was at Bulsar this *Bhagat* used to go there and stay with one of his friends for a fortnight or so. People used to assemble and sing devotional songs. When Mahadev went to Bulsar for vacation, he too joined these *bhajan* parties. The *Bhagat* made him sing devotional songs. In the year 1912, Mahadev went to Godhra accompanied by his cousin, Chhotubhai, for meeting the *Bhagat*. The occasion is described by Chhotubhai in the following words :

"We got down at the station at 10 p.m. *Bhagatji* was there to receive us. Mahadev was happy to see him at the station. *Bhagatji* took us to his residence and greeted us by calling us saints. The next day when we had finished our bath at the lake, *Bhagatji* insisted on washing our clothes and on carrying the washed clothes for us. He argued that he could not forgo this rare privilege of rendering service to saints ! We then had a programme of *bhajans*. After the programme, Mahadev said, 'It has been my lot to be obliged by others. Even my education was paid for by others. People have always been good to me



and I have been ever taking advantage of their kindness.' *Bhagatji* replied, 'You should not worry about that. Have you not seen a drama? Some one appears as a king and another as an attendant. But both are acting their parts. The king also knows that he is an actor. If he commits a mistake he will be taken to task by the manager. In the same way God has sent us to this world for playing our parts. We have to act properly the part which has been assigned to us. We should think of nothing else. Whatever position we may occupy in life, we should think simply that we have been sent to enact a play. God is the owner. We have to do what He has entrusted to us to do.' The *Bhagat* insisted on our staying a day longer. When we left he came to the station to see us off and placed two rupees in Mahadev's hands, remarking that he could not send away children and saints like us with empty hands. All through our travel in the train, Mahadev talked about the *Bhagat*. He said, 'He is a true saint. He did not show any change in his behaviour to us during the course of these two days we were with him. How we lose our own selves and attain absolute peace when we approach him, whatever our ideas in going to him! How humble! Even the meanest work he does himself. What a spirit of service! He did not allow us to do anything. Such service of others is what we must learn from him.' "

When the *Bhagat* died in 1926, Mahadev wrote an article in the *Navajivan* (dated 14-11-1926) under the title: 'A saint passes away'. He wrote in that article: "His manner of explaining seemingly difficult things was unique. Being a man of very meagre education, he explained things in a very simple way.....What is the main idea in the Gita? In

answer to this question, he once said 'If you go on repeating the word Gita-Gita-Gita, you will hear the word Tagi-Tagi-Tagi-, which means renunciation. One who has succeeded in discarding his identity with the body, has understood the Gita correctly !' On another occasion, he surprised a great Pandit by explaining the meaning of the word *Moksha* thus : '*Moksha* contains two words — *Moha* (Infatuation) and *Kshaya* (Destruction). Thus *Moksha* means Destruction of Infatuation.' "

But he preached mostly through his *bhajans*, and the surprise of it was that the *bhajan* that naturally flowed out of his mouth, was just the one required by the state of mind of the person who came to meet him. He taught with great conviction that the way to overcome the ego and attachment to the body, was through humility and service. Here is one of his songs :

“ Be humble and you will be liked by the Lord,  
my brother,  
He who is humble is great in fact.  
When Narad bent and was humble,  
He was able to conquer self-deception.  
He could escape the cycle of birth and death  
Only after knowledge was imparted to him by  
the Fisherman Preacher.”

And here is another song :

“ All try to walk high, but none walks humbly,  
But he who walks humbly shall alone reach the  
Highest.  
Such is the essence of Rama’s teaching,  
my brother.  
Dhruva drank of this essence and Pralhad  
drank,

And so did Pipa and Rohidas.

Kabir was simply entranced when he drank it  
And he pined for more.

Such is the essence of Rama's teaching,  
my brother ! ”

Mahadev writes : “ I have never observed at any time before, the height of emotion and joy that the *Bhagat* reached while singing the above song.” Mahadev had the good fortune to continue his contact with this *Bhagat* for nearly fifteen years.

## 10

### CREDULOUSNESS

It must be noted here that Mahadev possessed a kind of credulousness alongside of his desire for devotion to God and association with saints. In the earlier days he wrote under the pen name of “ Bholā Shambhu ” meaning “ the Credulous One ” and he was truly credulous. When we were studying in high school and college, there was a famous magician named Mahomed Chhel. Mahadev met him one day in the train. Mahomed took a passenger's ring for having a look at it and threw it out of the window. The owner of the ring began to weep. Mahomed Chhel then asked some one sitting by his side to put his hand into his pocket. The man did so and found the ring besmeared with dust. Mahadev got enamoured of Mahomed Chhel after this incident. A magazine named *Hindu Spiritual Magazine* was being published those days. It contained, beside articles on Spiritualism, stories of ghosts, descriptions of meeting with spirits, and narrations of miraculous happenings. Mahadev believed



such stories and became a subscriber of the magazine. An advertisement appeared in that magazine to the effect that on your sending the impressions of both the palms of your hands with the date, place and time of your birth, a detailed forecast of your full life would be sent to you. Mahadev sent all these details and received a V.P.P. for Rs 2-2-0. The wonder of it is that Mahadev found details about himself in the palmist's forecast which, he said, not even his closest associate could have known !

One Mr Rane was a resident of Juhu. He could create artistic objects out of ordinary things from nature, merely by chiselling them here and there. He had, with his own labour, decorated very artistically his small bungalow and garden, by means of such articles. We students used to go there specially to see these decorations. He gave interviews on Thursdays and told one about one's past and future by observing lines on the hand, the head and the face. His bungalow and garden being really worth seeing, many people went to see them. But Mahadev went twice or thrice merely to know his future from him. In his childhood, Mahadev saw a number of wonderful things in the Mirror of Prediction ! It is fortunate that in spite of his faith in such things, he never tried to modify his programme of work in accordance with these predictions. Once at Simla, in the year 1938, Mahadev was out for a walk with his son Narayan. He came across an ascetic, who was doing some pranks like staring without a wink. Mahadev stopped to look at him. Narayan pressed him to proceed. Mahadev said, "The ascetic seems to be a marvellous man. He appears to be practising *tratak* (gaze fixed in meditation). We must meet him." To this Narayan replied "Kaka, you put your



faith in any man in the street. We are not going to the man ", and dragged him away. Mahadev later inquired about the man and found that he was a rogue. Mahadev was always credulous, when anyone talked to him about *siddhi* or miracle or about the use of a wonder drug or about *Mantra* or *Tantra*. But as he did not have any selfish purpose to accomplish thereby, he did not get involved in these magical practices, nor did they have any evil consequence on him.

## 11

### STUDY OF LAW

After passing his B.A. in 1910 Mahadev thought of studying for M.A. He wanted to take Sanskrit and study Shankar Bhasya thoroughly ; but Ramanuja Bhashya being prescribed that year, he decided to go in for the LL.B. course instead of M.A. With a view not to be a burden on his father, he decided to prosecute his studies on his own and earn by working. He got a job in the Oriental Translator's office on a monthly salary of sixty rupees. He took a room at Parel and settled there with Durgabahen. Shri Ramnarayan V. Pathak and Shri Gijubhai Badheka were his neighbours. He became a good friend of theirs.

#### A Difficult Test

He went through a bitter experience at the time of his second LL.B. examination. He had studied the subject of Equity more thoroughly than any other subject. But on the second day, he left the examination hall very early although the paper was on Equity.

Friends thought that he probably got nervous thinking that he could not answer the paper to his satisfaction. He would have easily passed even if he had written what he knew. Mahadev, however, returned home and started weeping loudly. His cousin, Chhotubhai, tried to console him in his characteristic way, saying, "Why are you weeping like a primary school boy? Are you not ashamed? What would people say if they saw you? Appear a second time for the examination. You do not have to ask for money from home. Why should you mind then?" But the reason for his leaving the hall and weeping was altogether different. Durgabahen was not then in Bombay. Mahadev was lying in bed late at night studying. A woman, staying in the same *chawl*, who had probably caught a fancy for him, came into his room seeing him alone, and suddenly lay down by his side on his bed, and started to make sensual advances to him. Mahadev was cold with terror. It was impossible for him to co-operate in such physical action, partly because of his faithfulness to Durgabahen and partly because of his dread of sinning. He regained his composure in a short time and having made the woman aware of her moral responsibility, requested her to leave him immediately. But he could not sleep for the whole night. The next day also he was totally out of balance, and when he went to the examination hall he felt absolutely dizzy and came away without writing anything. He did not mention this incident to any one except Durgabahen. Next year on the occasion of our LL.B. examination, when we were lying side by side one night talking about such experiences, he related this incident to me.

### **How We Came to Know Each Other**

My first acquaintance with Mahadev was through a proxy. After passing his Inter Arts Examination, a very good friend of mine, Shri Manubhai Mehta, went to Bombay from Ahmedabad to study at the St. Xavier's College. He too stayed at the G. T. Hostel. There he became a close friend of Mahadev. I continued in the Gujarat College at Ahmedabad, but started corresponding with Mahadev in the capacity of a friend's friend. We actually met each other at the end of 1911, at the vast amphitheatre built on the Apollo Bunder for the reception of King George V, who had come to India. After this I went to Bombay for my study of Law. I worked in an Insurance Company and stayed in a hired room at Santa Cruz. Mahadev stayed at Parel. We met each other very often in the college as well as in the local train. During the last term of our second LL.B., however, many of us students shifted to the newly built Parvati Mansion near Grant Road station. Mahadev also shifted from his room in Parel. Manubhai stayed at the Parvati Mansion with his family. Mahadev and I dined in his house. We came very close to each other during this period, and our relationship to one another became even more intimate than that of blood brothers.

### **Other Occasions of Test**

Mahadev related everything about himself to Gandhiji. He must have, therefore, told him also about the incident on the night of his LL.B. examination. Mahadev had other experiences of a similar nature later — two with Indian ladies and two with European ones. He got somewhat involved with the Indian ladies, but was able to preserve the purity of his body. I can bear witness to his having been able to wash off



his mental sins by his tears of remorse. So far as the European ladies went, he was on his guard from the very beginning. He succeeded in leading these four ladies to the right path. Shri Kishorlal has written about this in beautiful language. I would rather quote his words :

“Mahadev had to face very delicate situations more than once. This was due to a number of causes like his gentle nature, his chivalrous character, his proficiency in literature, music and art, and a temperament full of tenderness and susceptible to the influence of love. Generally women do not lead the attack in sex, but it would appear that when they are dissatisfied with life, or are miserable, or have got into the hands of some one they dislike, they boldly lead the attack in search of the support of a sympathetic and capable man. Mahadev had such an experience twice or thrice. He could not claim to possess cent per cent purity like that of Hanuman. But his sense of fidelity was not less than that of Hanuman. His fidelity towards his wife was as intense as that towards his master. This sense of fidelity kept him safe. He very skilfully brought these ladies round and helped them to rise to a higher moral level, and at the same time he protected his own character.

“He was not fortunate enough to possess the absolute purity of Hanuman. But he had achieved sufficient character to be able to withstand infatuation for women. This was not, of course, achieved except with much difficulty, mental struggle and remorse. But all this greatly enhanced his natural humility.”



## TRAINING IN THE ORIENTAL TRANSLATOR'S OFFICE

He served in the Oriental Translator's Office during the period of his study for the LL.B. The training that he got there proved very useful to him later. He had to translate into English such portions from periodicals and books, as were suspected to be objectionable from the Government's point of view, and of presenting the translation to his higher officer for scrutiny. Besides such word for word translation, he had to write summaries of whole articles and sometimes even of whole books. His skill in looking after Gandhiji's correspondence in different languages and helping him to run his weeklies in three languages, in making precise and fine translation from one language into another with speed, and in presenting summaries of long letters and articles covering all the important points, was probably a result of his service in this office for nearly three years.

Shri Mohanlal Pandya had written a book named 'Vegetable Medicines', in which he had given formulae for preparing bombs, under the name of medicines. Mahadev reported that the book should be banned. The whole of Gujarat knows Shri Mohanlal Pandya as a soldier in the Satyagraha Fight. But prior to Gandhiji's return to India, he was a member of a group of terrorists and had even tried to manufacture bombs.

When Lokamanya Tilak's *Gitarahasya*, written by him in the Mandalay Jail, came for censorship to

the Translator's Office, it was Mahadev who had the first chance of going through the manuscript.

### **A Tour of Cutch**

Mahadev fell ill after the incident of leaving the examination hall on the occasion of his second LL.B. examination. There being no question of completing his term, he wanted to go to some suitable place for a change, taking long leave from his office. By chance, he came across a rich Cutchi family, who were going to the province for a few months and were in search of a tutor for one of their children. He made it plain to them that a change being his main purpose, every minute of his time outside the fixed tuition hours, would be his own and he must not be asked to do any work regarding their business or other matters. He would go with them only if this condition was to be scrupulously observed. The question of the observance of this condition, however, did not arise, as Mahadev won over the hearts of the entire family, and the boy was greatly attached to his tutor.

### **Translation of Morley's 'On Compromise'**

While Mahadev was serving in the Oriental Translator's Office, the Gujarat Forbes Society advertised a prize of one thousand rupees for the best Gujarati translation of Lord Morley's book *On Compromise*. This was probably in the year 1913. Mahadev offered to stand for the competition and sent his translation of three or four pages as a specimen to the Scrutiny Committee. A few persons who were well known in the field of literature and were regarded as learned, were also competing. The Scrutiny Committee, however, passed Mahadev's specimen translation and entrusted the work to him. It was a matter of surprise for many that a fresh graduate, totally

unknown in the field of literature, should have been chosen for the translation of a difficult book, in preference to other well-known persons who had competed with him. When we went to attend the Literary Conference at Surat in the year 1914, we noticed that people pointed to Mahadev as the person who had been chosen for translating 'On Compromise'. He completed this translation while he was practising as a lawyer in Ahmedabad. But he revised the whole after coming to the Ashram. Shri Kakasaheb helped considerably in revising the first few chapters. This book was published by the Navajivan Trust in 1925, under the title of "*Satyagrahani Maryada*".

## 13

## PLEADER'S PRACTICE IN AHMEDABAD

Mahadev passed his LL.B. examination at the end of 1913. None stood in the first class that year. Mahadev stood first in the Equity paper, in which he had failed the previous year. After the convocation was over, Mahadev started considering his future programme. His father was transferred to Ahmedabad as headmaster of the Women's Training College. A pleader's practice at Ahmedabad would, therefore, save Mahadev establishment expense. I too pressed him for Ahmedabad. He, therefore, resigned his service as Translator in 1914 and took a district court *Sanad* at Ahmedabad. He stayed in Ahmedabad on the whole for fifteen to eighteen months. He got only one case as a pleader. A *Jagirdar* under the Mahikantha Agency wanted to send an application to the Governor of Bombay. Shri Ramnarayan Pathak was practising as



a pleader at Sadra. He entrusted the work of writing this application to Mahadev for which he received a fee of Rs 125/-.

### **Drafted Pandyaji's Application**

He also wrote an application to the Governor of Bombay for Shri Mohanlal Pandya. It has already been stated that Mahadev reported against Shri Pandya's anonymous book called '*Vegetable Medicines*'. Shri Pandya was Dairy Superintendent of Baroda State. The Gaikwad of Baroda, having come under the suspicion of the Government of India in the year 1912, was forced to dismiss Shri Pandya from the State service. The police then tried their best to involve him in a case of treason. Shri Pandya remained in hiding for about a year to escape the police, but eventually he came out. The Government could secure no evidence against him, but they started harassing him by setting the C.I.D. after him. To evade the C.I.D. by putting them on the wrong track was considered bravery in those days. Pandyaji too harassed the police in this manner as much as they harassed him. He and I belonged to the same village and our families were well acquainted with each other. When I started work as a pleader Pandyaji urged me to free him from the harassment of the C.I.D. We decided to send an application to the Governor of Bombay, and as Mahadev had come to Ahmedabad, we got the application drafted by him. This was his second work as a pleader. The application brought no result.

When Gandhiji came to Ahmedabad, Pandyaji told him his plight. Gandhiji advised him to forget the C.I.D. and to move about and carry on his activities openly. If they asked him about his movements, he should give them true details. Then there would be

no further need for them to try and get information about him. If in spite of this, he still felt harassed he should go to him and settle down in the Ashram.

### **Translation of Chitrangada**

When Mahadev was at Ahmedabad, we jointly translated Ravindranath Tagore's dramatic piece, *Chitrangada*. We decided to translate into Gujarati all the Bengali writings of Ravindranath. To translate *Naukadubi* we apportioned its pages between us. But the course of our activities took a different turn from what we expected, and this desire remained unfulfilled. The only work we did in this connection was the translation of *Vidaya Abhishap* and *Prachin Sahitya*.

## 14

### INSPECTOR OF CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES

In the meanwhile the day of his father's retirement was approaching. Mahadev saw that it would be difficult for him to maintain his Ahmedabad establishment on his practice as a pleader after his father's retirement. He began to consider how to meet the situation. Shri Vaikunthbhai Mehta was working in the Central Co-operative Bank of Bombay. These were days when the Co-operative Movement had just been started. The Bank was issuing loans to co-operative societies in rural areas. It wanted, therefore, to engage an inspector of its own to find out whether these societies were working properly. Shri Mehta proposed that Mahadev should do this work. Mahadev accepted the proposal and was entrusted with the work of inspecting Co-operative

Societies in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Shri Vaikunthbhai has expressed his appreciation of Mahadev's work in the following words :

“ He was as successful in this as he was in any other work. He established friendly relations with the members and workers of the societies he visited, both in Gujarat and Maharashtra. His reports regarding the condition of the societies and the needs of their members, were not only full of information and valuable suggestions, but were also noteworthy from the point of view of style and language.

“ An incident in connection with his inspection work deserves to be mentioned. Having visited a co-operative society in Kaira District, Mahadev made some specific recommendations which he sent directly to the Bank for implementation. The reason for sending it directly was that the person, who worked as an Honorary Organizer in that division on behalf of the Co-operative Department, had withheld the society's application for loan without sufficient cause. That person thought that Mahadev had ignored him in sending the case direct to the Bank. He complained to the Registrar of the Co-operative Department that the recommendation ought to have been sent through him as per established practice and stated that an element of irresponsibility would enter into the departmental machinery, if such a procedure were not followed. The Head of the Co-operative Department instructed the Bank to direct Mahadev to work in accordance with the established practice and to send his recommendation to the Honorary Organizer for enquiry. When Mahadev was asked for an explanation, he sent such a convincing reply that the Government Registrar after going through it, could no longer press his



suggestion. On the contrary, he had to admit that by direct correspondence Mahadev had made it easier for the Society and served it well.

“As the Manager of the Bank at that time, I shall ever remain indebted to Mahadev for having left a stamp of honesty, fearlessness and spirit of service on the newly started institution.

“Mahadev became acquainted for the first time with the social and economic problems of villages through his work in the Bank.

“Even in his official communications his literary style and his handwriting impressed all in our office. Although he had to suffer a number of hardships in his travels, we could notice in his letters depth of feeling and a natural love for village life. I cannot say whether Mahadev was more of a poet than a philosopher, but I could definitely notice the hidden poet in the descriptions he gave in his letters. In college, I knew him as a person of studious habits who was interested in wide reading; but my contact with him now showed me that he possessed the highest literary art. He had as much command of English as he had of Gujarati.”

Kakasaheb once asked him how it was that he knew Marathi so well. Mahadev replied that he had travelled widely in Maharashtra in bullock carts as the Inspector of Co-operative Societies. He had learnt his Marathi then through his conversation with Marathi speaking people in the villages, often carried on while chewing betel leaves offered by them.

Once Mahadev visited a village named Ghadkhol in Ankaleswar Taluka. Arjun *Bhagat* lived there. Mahadev heard his *bhajans* sung by the people. He found the songs full of devotion. He secured from

the *Bhagat's* sons the manuscript of those *bhajans*. The boys had no means of getting them printed. Mahadev edited those songs and got them published by the Navajivan Trust in 1925 under the title of *Arjuna Vani*.

Mahadev fully exposed to the Bank all the weaknesses of the Co-operative Societies of that time. Many money lenders got themselves enrolled as members of Co-operative Societies. They got loans sanctioned by the Societies for such of their creditors as were unable to repay their personal debts, and thus got their own loans repaid. The Secretary of one Society had even misappropriated some of the funds of the Society. Mahadev threatened him and made him replace the amount. During his visits to the villages Mahadev took with him a man servant as well as all that was necessary for cooking his own food. He stayed with the Secretary of the Society, only when he could not get accommodation in a public place. Mahadev described to me a woeful incident which happened when he was resting at night in the house of one such Secretary. The man returned home heavily drunk and harassed his wife throughout the night. In spite of the woman's effort to suppress her sobs in view of the fact that a stranger was sleeping in the house, they reached Mahadev's ears. Mahadev felt like getting up and bringing the fellow to his senses, but he thought it improper to intervene at that late hour of night in a quarrel between husband and wife. Mahadev sent a very strong report of this incident also. The Government Registrar felt that all these reports from Mahadev were excessively harsh. He thought that such strictness, at a stage when Co-operative Societies had been started only with great difficulty, would

affect adversely increase in the number of Societies. Mahadev's mind rose in revolt against this line of thought and, besides, being tired of the hard life of continuous travelling, he sent in his resignation.

### **Home Rule League**

Those were days when the first World War was in full swing and England was in need of maximum help from India. The then Secretary of State for India, Mr Montague, declared in a speech, that England should give responsible government to India at the earliest opportunity after the termination of the War, for the machinery of government had become lifeless and wooden.' This speech greatly impressed our politicians. The Bombay Home Rule League got it translated by Mahadev through Mr Brelvi and published it. The translation was so good that Shri Shankarlal Banker thought of engaging Mahadev in the Home Rule League. Shri Jamnadas Dwarkadas was reckoned as a first rank leader of Bombay. He wanted Mahadev to accept his personal secretaryship. But Shri Vaikunthbhai was not prepared to relieve him. He said, "You need not work as an Inspector. We can post you as the manager of our Hyderabad Branch." Mahadev was not attracted by any of these proposals. His destiny was dragging him towards Gandhiji. He, however, worked as Shri Jamnadas's Secretary for a fortnight. Shri Jamnadas was the president of the Broach District Political Conference. The only work that Mahadev did as his secretary was to prepare his presidential address.



## FIRST CONTACT WITH GANDHIJI

Gandhiji came to Ahmedabad in April 1915 and started his Ashram in a hired bungalow near Kocharab. After some time he issued a draft of the rules and objects of the Ashram and requested his friends all over the country, to send their opinions and criticisms of them as well as of the name of the Ashram. A few copies of this draft were placed on the table of the Gujarat Club. Mahadev and I read the draft and decided to send our criticisms of it. At first, each of us wrote our criticisms separately and then prepared a joint letter on the basis of these two drafts and sent it to Gandhiji. We had requested Gandhiji not to take the trouble of sending a written reply to our letter, but to call us personally if necessary. I have not got with me a copy of our letter now, but we had given expression to our bookish opinion that compulsory celibacy might possibly give rise to a number of evils, and that exclusive insistence on handicrafts would hamper the economic development of the country. As we received no reply to this letter even after five or six days, we concluded that Gandhiji did not attach any importance to it.

Shortly after this, Gandhiji came to speak in a public meeting at the Premabhai Hall. We followed him when he started to return to his Ashram after the meeting. He was walking very fast, and we had therefore almost to run to catch up with him. We reminded him of our letter. He said, "Yes I have received a letter signed by two persons. Are you the two? I have

been wanting to call you. I have received a number of letters from other provinces and most of them are good. The one from Sir Gurudas Banarjee is specially good. I have received very few letters from Gujarat. Of these, yours has appealed to me most. I shall definitely spare time for you. Come and have a talk with me now, if you have time."

### Initiation

We were happy to go with him. We had the following conversation on our way :

Gandhiji : What are you doing ?

We : Practising as pleaders.

Gandhiji : Have you got the latest *Indian Year Book* ? I want to look up something in it.

I : I have one of the last year. I shall, however, procure the latest for you.

Gandhiji : Is this how you practice ? When I used to shave, I used to keep the latest shaving equipment.

He took out our letter after we reached the Ashram and discussed it as he read it. He explained his ideals and viewpoint for nearly an hour and a half. We intervened with our arguments here and there, but most of the time we did the hearing. We were greatly impressed by his continuous exposition for ninety minutes. We left the Ashram at about 10 p.m. It was drizzling. We walked without exchange of a word, although our thoughts were similar. When we reached Ellis Bridge Mahadev spoke out, "Narahari, I have half a mind to go and sit at the feet of this man." I replied, "We shall be most blessed, if we can do so. But I cannot make up my mind just now." After this we again lapsed into silence and reached our respective abodes without the exchange of a word. This was our

first initiation, the first springing up of a desire to join the Ashram.

Mahadev had nearly completed his translation of Lord Morley's *On Compromise* in the year 1916. It was necessary to get Lord Morley's permission before publishing it. Mahadev drafted a letter to him, but felt that as the letter was being written to no less a person than Lord Morley, it would be best to show the draft to some one who had recently returned from England and who was conversant with the etiquette and manners of that country. I suggested that we should go to Gandhi Saheb (for we then addressed him in that manner). So we went to the Ashram. Mahadev explained everything about the translation of *On Compromise* to Gandhiji and showed him the draft letter. Gandhiji did not like it and said, "It is not for nothing that Englishmen call us flatterers who are unfit for Swaraj. Such high praise of Morley as a man of learning and a philosopher, is out of place in this letter. Besides, why should your hand quiver and your pen falter in writing him a letter? You have to write a simple business letter. It should mention briefly how the Forbes Association came to choose you for this work and how carefully you have done the translation, and it need not contain more than ten to fifteen lines. Lord Morley would not care to read a longer letter. I shall dictate the letter if you want. Come along, write.

### **Respect for Our Own Language**

We had a long discussion that day on subjects connected with Gujarati language and literature. During the discussion Mahadev, in the heat of argument, used a number of English words and sentences.



Having heard him to the end, Gandhiji laughed at him and remarked, "If you talk such a language to your mother, she will surely give you credit for your vast learning, but the poor lady will not understand a word of what you say." He then pointed out the extent of the crime committed by educated Gujaratis in neglecting the Gujarati language. This idea that we should learn to respect our own language made us Gandhiji's admirers. The late Mohanlal Pandya and the late Dayaljibhai were intense devotees of Gandhiji. I had a feeling of respect for Pandyaji as an elder, and so had Mahadev for Dayalji. I must admit that these two men too were responsible for increasing our attraction to Gandhiji.

After this, Mahadev was appointed Inspector of Co-operative Societies by the Central Co-operative Bank. His visits to Ahmedabad became less frequent after his father's retirement. I, however, visited the Ashram very often, and Mahadev joined me in these visits whenever he came to Ahmedabad. It was during this period that Thakor, one of Mahadev's younger brothers, died and Mahadev gave Rs 500/- to Gandhiji in memory of his deceased brother. This was his saving from his new appointment.

## INDENTURED LABOUR

My visits to the Ashram were now more frequent. The system of Indentured Labour which compelled Indian labourers to go and work on the extensive plantations of white landlords in colonies like Africa and Fiji for five years by an agreement, was known among the labourers as Girmitia (a distortion of the word Agreement) System. In the year 1912, the Hon. Shri Gokhale had introduced in the Central Legislature of Delhi which had been newly established in accordance with the Morley Minto Reforms, a resolution to stop this system. But the Government had not done anything in the matter.

In March 1916 Pandit Malaviya brought a similar resolution before the Central Legislature. Lord Hardinge, while accepting the resolution, promised that the Government would implement the purpose of the resolution in due course. Not satisfied with this, Gandhiji started correspondence with the Government over this matter. The Viceroy interpreted the phrase 'in due course' to mean within a period reasonably essential for introducing a new system. This interpretation did not satisfy the leaders, and permission was sought to introduce a resolution in the Assembly, demanding that the System should be immediately stopped. Lord Chelmsford was the Viceroy at that time. He refused to give the permission. Gandhiji felt that a countrywide agitation must be launched against the System, and if necessary even Civil Disobedience, as this was a point on which Satyagraha could be offered. During the course of his discussions with the

leaders, he expressed the view that they might interpret the phrase 'immediately stopped' in one way, while the Government might interpret it in another. The resolution should, therefore, demand "stopping of the system before 30th July". Gandhiji carried on frequent talks with the Viceroy and the leaders. He mentioned in his prayer meetings such points in the talks as could be made public, and asked persons who came to meet him in the Ashram, whether they were prepared to court jail. Pandyaji and I expressed our readiness. Mahadev was still serving as an Inspector of the Bank. I sent long letters to Mahadev giving him details of Gandhiji's talks in the Ashram. Our Bombay friends read these letters with great interest. As the result of countrywide agitation and Gandhiji's unbending attitude, the Viceroy in the end declared that the system of Indentured Labour would be stopped before 30th July.

## 17

## I JOINED THE ASHRAM

It was during this period, i.e. in April 1917, that Gandhiji started his experiment of Satyagraha in Champaran. He had been served with a notice to quit Champaran District. He was to be prosecuted for the breach of the notice. He had written to a number of friends on the night previous to the date of his prosecution, entrusting various responsibilities to them. In his letter to Shri Maganlal Gandhi instructing him about the Ashram, he wrote that I should be reckoned as one of the Ashram, as he was favourably impressed by me. I had decided to spend the summer vacation



of that year in the Ashram and had secured Gandhiji's permission for it.

Prof. Sankalchand Shah of the Gujarat College and Shri Kakasaheb were staying in the Ashram when I went there. They had obtained Gandhiji's permission to start a national school in the Ashram. I joined in their discussion of the curriculum and other details relating to the school. They finally decided to have the opening of the school on the full moon day of Vaishakh, the birth-day of Lord Buddha. It was the seventh day of May by the English Calendar. I told them two days before this that I was prepared to join the school if Gandhiji's consent could be got. Shri Maganlal Gandhi told me that Gandhiji's consent was as good as obtained.

My decision to join the school was taken on the spot. I did not consult members of my family or my relatives, as I was sure that they would not give their consent, if they were asked. They were greatly perturbed when they knew my decision. Mahadev and I had for long thought of taking this step, but my final decision came quite suddenly. Mahadev was glad to know of this and he took the earliest opportunity to meet me in the Ashram.

### **Mahadev's Visit to the Ashram**

Gandhiji was in the Ashram when Mahadev came. Gandhiji had written a pamphlet in Gujarati explaining the nature of Satyagraha. He asked us teachers to translate it into English. We knew that none of us could pass in Gandhiji's test of English and we were slightly puzzled. Mahadev arrived that very day and I entrusted the work to him. We went to Gandhiji at 4 p.m. with the translation. Mahadev had a long discussion with Gandhiji as the latter went on suggesting

changes in the translation. This translation by Mahadev, and the discussion over it raised Mahadev in Gandhiji's esteem.

## 18

## MAHADEV'S SERVICES REQUISITIONED

Mahadev left his Bank Inspector's job in August, and met Gandhiji in Bombay. He was in great demand by various persons, as I have already mentioned. He wrote in his letter to me the details of his talk with Gandhiji. I shall give here the full text of the letter, as it explains the whole situation.

Bombay, 2nd Sept., 1917

My dear Narahari,

You should treat this letter as strictly confidential. I start it with a request that you should not communicate its contents to anyone. I have already told you that I visited Gandhiji's residence regularly. On the morning of 31st August, certain words of Bapuji created in me the mixed feelings of love, dismay and joy. I shall now try to pen in this letter my short talk with him on that day, although it cannot be easily put into words. Bapuji said :

“ It is not without reason that I have asked you to visit my place every day. I want you to come and stay with me. I have seen your capacity during the last three days. I have found in you just the type of young man for whom I have been searching for the last two years. Will you believe me if I tell you that I have got in you the man I wanted — the man to whom I can entrust all my work some day and be at ease, and on whom I can rely with confidence ? You

have to come to me. Leave the Home Rule League, Shri Jamnadas and everything else. I have spoken like this only to three persons before this, Mr Polak, Miss Schlesin and Shri Maganlal. Today I am speaking in the same way to you and I am very happy to do so, for I have found three outstanding qualities in you. They are regularity, fidelity and intelligence. When I first picked up Maganlal, to all appearances he had nothing special about him. But today you are surprised by his personality. He was not educated. I trained him first for press work. He learnt composing in Gujarati and then in English, Hindi, Tamil and other languages. I was surprised at the speed at which he mastered the art. Since then he has shown his skill in various kinds of work. Let us, however, leave aside Maganlal. The intelligence I have found in you I did not see in him. I am confident that you will be useful to me in various ways because of your good qualities.” (I listened to all this with surprise and shyness, without speaking a single word. I interrupted by saying, ‘I have never shown you anything I have done’, to which he answered as follows).

“How do you know? I can judge people in a very short time. I judged Polak within five hours. He read my letter published in a newspaper and wrote me a letter. He then came to see me and I at once saw what he was, and since then he became my man. He married and started his practice as a pleader only after he joined me. He told me before marriage that he must earn a little for his children. I told him plainly ‘you are mine and the responsibility to provide for you and your children is mine, not yours. I am getting you married, as I see no objection to your marrying.’ His marriage was celebrated at my



residence. But to revert to the point under discussion, I advise you to give up all thought about the Home Rule League or Jamnadas. Go to Hyderabad. Enjoy yourself for a year or so. Enjoy the pleasures of life to your satisfaction. The moment you start feeling that you are losing yourself resign from there and come and join me." At this I told him that I was prepared even then to join him. But he replied, "I know that you are prepared, but I want you to see a little more of life and enjoy yourself. I would need your knowledge of the Co-operative Movement also. We have to free that department from its defects. Do not be anxious about anything and come back to me after enjoying life for a little longer. I need you for me personally, not for the school, nor for any other work. You may continue where you are for a year or six months. I shall manage without you until then."

This talk was like a flow of nectar to me. I drank it for more than half an hour. People then began to flock in and our personal talk stopped. I have continued my visits and tonight I intend to accompany him up to Palghar. Now that he has shown so much affection for me, I think it would not be wrong on my part to request him to carry some fruit for your ailing brother, Shankarbhai. This morning I told him that Shri Shankarlal Banker was angry with me. He inquired why. I told him that it was due to the decision I had taken two days back. Bapu then said, 'You should stand his loss of temper. You must.' I told Bapu that Shri Banker was at a loss to know why Bapu should not allow me to work with the Home Rule League, if I gave up Hyderabad and stayed in Bombay, and that I replied to Shri Banker that he could easily get a person to work as an organizer in

my place. Shri Banker did not think he could get one as good as I. I pointed out to Bapu the false position in which I was placed by people who put my price higher than what I considered it to be. Bapuji's comment on this was very short. He said, 'It would be suicidal for us to accept other people's valuation of us. Let them say what they will. You are not concerned with it. It is enough that you have given voluntary service to the League for a couple of hours every evening during your stay in Bombay.'

This is how matters stand. The letter is getting long, but to whom else can I confide these things, if not to you? Send me back this letter after you have read it, for I have given Bapu's talk in his own words. They may be forgotten in course of time. I have not told my father or any one else the reasons for changing my decision to join the Home Rule League. It would be foolish to write such things in letters. I would like to read this letter to my father and my wife on a suitable occasion.

I have sent a telegram to Hyderabad saying that I would take up the job if I were given rupees three hundred per month. I have received no reply. If I do not go to Hyderabad, I shall continue in the Bank until Bapu wants me to, and shall hire rooms in Bombay within a few days. I must start getting ready for starting whenever Bapu calls me. This means elaborate preparation for carrying on the great penance. May God give me strength. I shall start translation of Gokhaleji's \* speeches from tomorrow. I shall work

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\* Translation of Gokhaleji's speeches and writings into Gujarati was undertaken by Mahadev and me in response to Gandhiji's appeal.

at it for a short time every morning, as I must attend the Home Rule League work in the evenings. I hope your wife is better now.

Yours sincerely,  
Mahadev

PS. : I was sometimes tired of life and regarded it as futile, but now I have developed enough faith in myself to think that life is worth living. Although Bapu told me all these nice things about me and completely embarrassed me, I am unable even now to accept his estimation of me. The only thing certain is that I have never got, nor shall I ever get, such a testimonial in my life. Maybe, I shall be an instrument to achieve something in life for which the world will praise me ; but these utterances, emanating from Bapu's heart, shall ever remain with me as my life-long treasure.

## 19

### TO CHAMPARAN WITH GANDHIJI

It was not possible for Mahadev after this talk with Gandhiji to fix his mind on anything. The first Gujarat Political Conference met at Godhra in November. Mahadev went there with Durgabehn to see Gandhiji. Gandhiji told both of them to accompany him for some time in his tour and make up their minds finally after that. Gandhiji was going straight to Champaran from Godhra and Mahadev and his wife joined him.

#### **His Father's Objections**

Mahadev's father had two objections against his joining Gandhiji. The first was that Mahadev, being



physically very delicate and unused to manual labour, would not be able to stand the physical strain and hard life with Gandhiji. Secondly, he thought that such a course of life could be undertaken with advantage only after having first achieved a place of honour in society. Those who accepted it right at the beginning of their career were bound to regret it later. He had no attraction for earning well or accumulating money. Once we were taking tea at Mahadev's place. A friend of his father was there. We could see a millowner's mansion from where we were seated. The friend told Mahadev that he would be satisfied only when Mahadev was able to build a similar mansion out of his earnings. Mahadev's father replied, "I do not want a mansion or a bungalow. Our huts are our palaces. How do we know what sort of life the dwellers of these mansions are leading? Nor do we know whether they are happy or miserable. I am, therefore, fully satisfied in our present condition, if only we can live free of all blemish." His father's objection to Mahadev working for Gandhiji was not, therefore, based on consideration of money. It was for other reasons. Mahadev tried to console his father by telling him, "I am not going to Gandhiji with the ambition of achieving greatness. I want to live like his shadow, going about with him, receiving training under him, and getting more and more knowledge. I would have considered your objection, if I wanted to be a leader. As to honour, Gandhiji has got it already. Why should I then bother?"

#### **At Last with Gandhiji**

After his tour in Champaran, Mahadev returned to Dihien to get his father's blessings. I was then with Gandhiji in Champaran. One day we received Mahadev's telegram that he was coming with his wife.

I went to the station to receive them, but they did not turn up. When I returned from the station, Gandhiji showed me another telegram from Mahadev, stating that in spite of his strong desire he could not join Gandhiji, as his father would be greatly grieved if he did so.

Although he dispatched such a telegram, his father could not bear Mahadev's subsequent mental agony. He, therefore, gave him his blessings and permission to join Gandhiji. On the third day we again received a telegram from Mahadev that he was starting, as he had received his father's blessings. When I left for the station, Gandhiji said to me, "How funny it would be if we received another telegram saying that Mahadev was not coming." To this I replied that he was sure to come that day.

And Mahadev did come that day, accompanied by Durgabahen. Since that day right up to his death, he remained with Gandhiji, into whom he merged himself completely. Mahadev, of course, got the pleasure and joy of having fulfilled the mission of his life by accepting this dedication. But what about Durgabahen? She also had no attraction for worldly pleasures and wealth. She aspired for nothing more than the opportunity to stay permanently with Mahadev, even in this new life. But Mahadev had always to go about with Gandhiji, who took Durgabahen also with him whenever possible. But such occasions were very rare. After we had stayed together at Motihari in Champaran for a few days, Mahadev accompanied Gandhiji to attend the Calcutta Congress. As was already decided, my wife and I went to a village for conducting a school and doing village sanitation work. Durgabahen went to another village with a lady

worker named Anandibai to do educational and other work. This was the beginning of her staying away from Mahadev, who had given up the Co-operative Inspector's job, chiefly because it required him to be always on tour and did not allow him to lead a family life. This new work with Gandhiji was no doubt an extraordinary and precious privilege in life. But as far as family life and Durgabahen were concerned, there was no improvement in the situation. Even after returning to the Ashram from Champaran, Mahadev came to the Ashram only when Gandhiji came. And when he came he was almost always accompanied by guests. These were Gandhiji's guests, but they preferred to stay with Mahadev. Durgabahen thus got an opportunity of fulfilling a householder's duty of extending hospitality to guests and she did it in the best possible manner ; but it prevented her from having any quiet time with her husband. The following lines of poet Nanalal aptly describe her condition, and Durgabahen used to sing them very often :

“ As I turn the pages of Destiny  
I find them full of a Saga of Separation.  
Alas ! Destitute is the abode of Love.”

Thus it was that their married life became for them a life of hard penance.



## AS NURSE AND AS PATIENT

Mahadev possessed a wonderful knack of keeping patients in good humour. He was always ready to nurse them with affection. Many of his friends inside and outside the Ashram experienced his loving care during illness. There is nothing surprising in his nursing persons like me or Shri Kishorlal with utmost love. But he did not limit himself in nursing only to friends.

Once Mahadev was returning to the Ashram in a carriage accompanied by Shri Ramdas. They saw a female monkey lying in a precarious condition, being attacked and torn by dogs. Mahadev brought her to the Ashram in the carriage. Fortunately for the monkey the quarters of Shri Chhaganlal Gandhi were then vacant. Mahadev kept her there. When we started dressing the wounds of the animal, it was found that the wound caused on her forehead by the teeth of the dogs was three quarters of an inch deep, and her legs were so severely bitten that she could not move. She was treated with earth padding ; and with proper diet, she regained strength enough to move about inside the room. One day some one having left the door open, she came out and climbed an adjoining tree. Durgabahen was afraid that she might again fall a prey to dogs and she followed her. But the monkey jumped from tree to tree and went right up to Vadaj. Durgabahen returned home fully tired, leaving the animal to the mercy of God.

Compassion is Durgabahen's natural gift. Once a bitch was seen lying in a serious condition between Durgabahen's and Kishorlal's quarters. Kishorlal sprinkled some water on her and gave her some milk. Durgabahen then actually kept her in her house and started nursing her. The bitch was cured. We gave her the name Premi — the loved one. In due course, she gave birth to pups. The verandahs of our houses were common to all of us, and these pups started soiling the verandahs. If any one struck any of these pups, Durgabahen stopped him saying that she would clean the whole verandah, but none should beat the pups. One day Kakasaheb told Mahadev, "These pups will probably not live long; they will trouble everyone and also suffer themselves. Keep one of them if you like, but allow me to kill the others." Durgabahen heard this, but said nothing, and stood at the door with tears in her eyes. Kakasaheb saw this, and walked away in silence. He never again dared to open the topic of killing the pups.

It is generally believed that a patient exercises dictatorship over all the persons of the house as well as over his nurse. But Mahadev was an exception to this. When in 1919 he was down with typhoid for six weeks, I observed that he could remain very jolly and sweet even as a patient. In spite of intense pain he always maintained his sense of humour and kept everyone round him laughing. One day when Shri Vaikunthbhai came for a visit, Mahadev said to him, "I am being nursed better than an emperor. Kakasaheb comes and presses my body twice every day; Narahari has taken upon himself the task of keeping ice continuously on my head, by first pressing the ice bag on his own head to give it the shape of a cap;

Kakasaheb and Narahari give me a hot water sponge in my bed every day. Kakasaheb describes how gorgeous the hollyhock flowers in rows look in his compound, thus increasing my eagerness to see them. The musician, Pandit Khare, visits me twice or thrice and sings to me his melodious songs ; Kishorlal entertains me by his talks on various subjects ; Swami and Jugatram present themselves for my service every night, even after a hard day's work at Navajivan. My father and the doctor are always at my side. And over and above all this, the post brings me a lovely letter from Bapu every day, in spite of his heavy work in the Punjab. Can any one be better cared for ? ”

## 21

## IN JAIL

Gandhiji had sent Mahadev to Allahabad in June or July 1921 on Pandit Motilal's request, to conduct the paper *Independent*. After a time the Government arrested Motilalji and Jawaharlalji. Being unable to stand the tone of articles in that paper, the Government subsequently effected the arrest of its second editor, George Joseph, and confiscated the Press in which it was being printed. Mahadev wrote an article 'I shall not die', and started publishing the paper by printing it on a cyclostyle machine. He too was arrested and convicted on 24th December to one year's jail. Durgabahen was then at Allahabad, and she stayed there for three months after the arrest. Mahadev had entrusted the paper to Shri Devdas Gandhi. Durgabahen used to help in running the cyclostyle, sticking the wrappers on the copies and writing the



addresses. Women in those days rarely helped in such work — especially so in North India. Malaviyaji was greatly pleased when he saw Durgabahen work like this, and congratulated her heartily.

An account of the harassment of political prisoners in the U. P. jails was published in the *Navajivan* in the form of a letter from Allahabad, which was probably written by Shri Devdas Gandhi. It was as follows :

“Yesterday we went to the jail, but could not get an interview. We had taken some eatables, books and a covering, but they were returned to us by the jailor. We could, however, meet Mahadevbhai this morning.

“He was kept with ordinary criminals and had to observe all jail rules. He was given jail uniform, comprising a black half shirt and half pant. This uniform is extremely dirty with a bad smell and is full of lice. He has been given two blankets, which have not been washed for many months. They are also full of lice.

“He has been provided a rusty iron pot for water. The rust poisons the water every time the pot is filled. No water can be kept in the pot for drinking at night. It becomes yellow by morning.

“There is a dirty water tank for bathing. The same water is used for drinking. There is a loin cloth for bathing, but no towel is supplied for drying the body. You have to dry yourself in the sun and put on the same dirty uniform that you had taken off. It is impossible for a man of Mahadev's delicate constitution to wash his clothes with a wet body and remain semi-naked until the clothes are dried.

“The food too is the ordinary jail food. Yesterday he ate at home and so took nothing in the jail at night.

Today in the morning some crude porridge-like substance was served. He took it, but it was full of grit and mud-particles.

“ You have to go out in the open for easing yourself. The water to be used on the occasion has to be carried in the same pot that is used for drinking. They keep in the cell an earthen pot for passing urine in at night. This too is kept open like the drinking pot. Mahadev has not yet been fettered.”

Mahadev's father burst into tears when he read this account and said, “ Mahadev has never suffered any misery in life, nor had he to contend with hardship. How can he pass a whole year in such a prison ? ”

In his letter of consolation to the father, Gandhiji wrote, “ It is good that Mahadev is jailed. He will get rest thereby. The work outside is so heavy, that he would have fallen ill. Although there is hardship in jail now, I am sure that conditions will improve very soon. Mahadev has the knack of winning over people wherever he goes. I am sure that by speaking sweetly and modestly he will have any undue hardship in jail life removed. You should neither lose patience nor worry.”

The treatment meted out to Mahadev raised a storm in U.P. Sir Lallubhai wrote a letter to the Viceroy, as a result of which Mahadev was immediately classed as a special prisoner and was given all facilities. He had to undergo inhuman hardship only for ten days.

### **Sister's Marriage**

Mahadev's sister was getting married when he was in Agra Jail. The Anavil community usually spends a lot of money on a girl's marriage. Mahadev was, therefore, worried about the heavy burden it

would entail on his father. He wrote to him, "I have Rs 2,600/- as a Fixed Deposit in the bank. But no amount can be withdrawn from it. If you let me know what sum you would require, I shall arrange to borrow it from friends like Shri Mathuradas Trikamji or Vaikunthbhai. You must not suffer for want of money. I would have helped you, if I were out. But now the whole burden has fallen on you." He sent a similar message to his father through Shri Chhotubhai, who went to see him in jail. He wrote to me to make it a point to go to Dihen on the occasion of the marriage and see that his father did not suffer on account of money. I went to Dihen and asked Mahadev's father about money. He told me that he had made satisfactory arrangements for it.

## 22

## FATHER'S DEATH

Gandhiji knew that Mahadev's father was always worried about his delicate health. Gandhiji, therefore, told him whenever he met him, that he should not worry about Mahadev's health, as the latter had been entrusted to his (Gandhiji's) care. Mahadev however knew this weakness of his father. The extraordinary love between father and son is clearly depicted in the following letter written to me by Mahadev on his father's death :

Dihen (Dist. Surat),  
6th July, 1923

Dear Brother,

I am in receipt of your letter of condolence. I know that your heart is as full of grief as mine. I missed you a lot when I received the telegram in the Ashram.



The death was unexpected. It was fortunate that I went home to see him on the occasion of the meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee at Surat. That was my last meeting with him. His health then was quite good. I had received a letter a few days before his death, saying that he was not well and that there was pain in the chest. I immediately wrote that I would reach on Sunday bringing Dr. Ghia from Surat. In his subsequent letter written on Sunday he asked me not to bring the doctor. On the contrary, he asked me to bring the publications of the Navajivan Prakashan Mandir and the book on Indigenous Colours. This put me off my guard. I thought that he was better and that the weakness was caused by the usual attack of nervousness. His letter written on Monday, the day of his passing away, was received by me after I had received the telegram communicating his death. He said in it that he felt that the nervous attack might deprive him of his life ; if it did not he would go to Ahmedabad. That very evening he was reading the *Navajivan* or some other paper. Some one who was with him then asked him to stop reading as he was too weak and required rest. My father said, 'You are right.' These were his last words. His head bent down and his eyes closed.

I have been facing it bravely, but I cannot stop my tears whenever I remember how he loved me and how he worried about me even in small matters. These tears will continue as long as his remembrance is with me. When I met him last, he said, 'This time I find that your chest has developed well. This is the result of regular life. You must not put on *chappals*. You should wear closed slippers to save your heels from cracking.' He had not outgrown his conception of me

as a child. There is no one left now, who would read my worthless articles in the *Navajivan* with as much affection as he did. An article bearing my name was for him a rare treasure. He wanted me very much to stay with him for a long time. I have not been able to satisfy his desire. I have not served him even for a day. Since the death of my mother he has been both father and mother to me throughout his life. His love towards me gave me an idea of how much a father could love. He was only sixty-two when he died, but even if he were eighty-two, I would have shed the same amount of tears of gratitude as I am doing now.

If the supplement of the *Navajivan* did not have to be published on Thursday, and if I had not received my father's letter asking for books and directing me not to bring the doctor, I would have definitely gone to him on Sunday. I have been persistently feeling that because of our strange notions about serving the country, I deprived myself of the privilege of consoling him by remaining with him in his last hours. This regret will remain with me throughout my life as an unhealable wound.

If you were with me, thinking of you as an older brother \* I would have laid my head in your lap, and lightened the burden of my heart by weeping it out. But let that be. You need not come now simply for this. Rain has not yet started here, but it is bound to come within a day or two. I shall start for the Ashram on the 15th or 16th. I shall write to you in advance. Will you kindly meet me at Surat if possible? Please do not worry even if you do not hear from me. But under no circumstance should you come

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\* I was only three months older than Mahadev.

to the Ashram only to meet me. After all, you are not going to be able to express your feelings more effectively by meeting me in person.

Durga will have to stay here upto Divali. When I return after the monsoon, I may fetch her back. You should go and see Ichhabahen † if you find time after the rainy season. She often enquired after you. Thanks to my father's personality, she too has developed a character which is better than that of the average stepmother.

It is a custom with us to give an after-death dinner. I can easily convince Ichhabahen about the monstrous nature of this custom. Both my cousins, Chhotubhai and Khandubhai, agree with me. We shall not, therefore, feed any relative or Brahmin on any of those days. I shall, of course, do the *Shraddha* worship, because I plead ignorance in that respect. I cannot discard as heresy a thing which I cannot understand. But I have eliminated the after-*Shraddha* feeding of Brahmins. The Brahmin may carry the provisions to his house and cook for himself. Others do not like this, but this being my first occasion to enforce my decision, I must not falter.

I shall receive a thousand rupees for my translation of *On Compromise*. I have decided to set aside half the amount for four scholarships of rupees hundred and twenty-five each, in memory of my father. Four boys or girls can learn the art of cloth-making within six months with this amount, staying in the Ashram. Please let me know how you like this idea.

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† Mahadev's stepmother

‡ Mahadev had translated this book of Lord Morley into Gujarati.



Now I shall have to come here oftener, at least once every two months. Ichhabahen cannot appear in public for at least six months; and besides, her presence here is necessary so long as the land is not leased out. The greatest difficulty is that there is no male member here in the house. I shall try to get one of Chhotubhai's brothers to stay here, if possible.

Yours affectionately,  
Mahadev

I was staying at Sarbhan in Bardoli Taluka, when Mahadev's father expired. Those were days of rain, and as the road from Surat to Dihen would be unsuitable for travel if it rained, Mahadev had asked me not to go to Dihen. But I hastened there immediately after receiving his letter. Garud Purana is usually read to prevent women from observing the customary mourning in public. Mahadev had never read it or heard it read. Thinking that it would bring him consolation he urged that it be read to him. But when he heard the horrible descriptions of the punishments of the God of Death and the horrors of Hell, he was puzzled as to why the Purana was read at all. The village teacher Manishankar said, "The last chapter of the book is full of philosophy. But people deliberately avoid reading it thinking it to be inauspicious." Shri Manishankar then brought him the book in Sanskrit. Having gone through it fully Mahadev found the last chapter very consoling. He said that the last chapter nullified everything that preceded it. On this, Manishankar remarked humorously, "If our priests read this chapter, they will have to starve. But being practical in their outlook, they avoid reading it." Mahadev wrote an article about this matter in the

*Navajivan*, quoting selected verses with translation from this unread chapter of Garud Purana. (See *Navajivan*, volume 4, special number 21, 26th July, 1923).

## 23

## MAHADEV'S WEALTH

My purpose in writing this sketch was to show the quality and quantity of wealth Mahadev brought with him when he joined Gandhiji — the wealth of character, devotion, intelligence, learning and skill. Starting with this capital he developed a personality, which is described by Shri Kishorlal in the following words with which I shall conclude this essay :

“In spite of his being a learned philosopher, writer, poet, singer and artist, he chose to become a sweeper ready to wash out the excreta of not only his master, but also of his friends, wife, servants and, for that matter, of any human being ; he became a nurse for tending the sick, a washerman to wash clothes, a cook to feed others, a clerk to copy out in a neat hand, a teacher who would correct written compositions, a colleague who would complete unfinished tasks, a secretary who would understand your thoughts and put them down in writing, an ambassador who would accomplish delicate errands with skill on your behalf, an advocate who would study carefully your side of the case and fight it out for you, an arbitrator who would remove every misunderstanding his master may have about you, a man of highest balance, who would try his best to preserve simultaneously varied

relationships like filial devotion, fidelity to the master, faithfulness to friends, love for wife and affection for the son. He was a comrade who would give courage and shelter to persons in distress. And in addition to all this, he was an ever alert *sadhak* who protected himself from allurements of love and attachment that were born of his chivalrous temperament and love of art, as also from emotions like ambition, lust for wealth and fame, and attraction for the other sex."

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